

Message Text

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EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

CAIRO FOR ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, US, IS, EG
SUBJ: SADAT'S ORAL MESSAGE TO BEGIN

REF: STATE 50901 AND PREVIOUS

1. VOLUMINOUS EXCHANGES AMONG ATHERTON, EILTS AND DEPT HAVE COVERED ALL OF THE POINTS ADEQUATELY WHICH PARTICULARLY TROUBLE ME ABOUT THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE SADAT ORAL MESSAGE. I CAN ADD ONLY ONE OR TWO POINTS CONCERNING THE MOOD WITH WHICH IT IS AWAITED HERE.

2. WHEN I MET ALONE WITH BEGIN LAST NIGHT, FEBRUARY 27, HE WAS IN A REFLECTIVE AND SOMEWHAT PENSIVE FRAME OF MIND. HE SEEMED GENUINELY PLEASED ABOUT THE LONG MEETING WITH ATHERTON YESTERDAY MORNING, AND MADE A POINT OF SAYING HOW MUCH HE RESPECTED AND ADMIRERD THE WAY ATHERTON WAS GOING ABOUT A VERY DIFFICULT TASK. HE SAID HE WAS VERY MUCH LOOKING FORWARD TO RECEIVING THE MESSAGE FROM SADAT WHICH ATHERTON HAD TOLD HIM WAS ON THE WAY. HE HOPED IT WOULD "SET THE RIGHT TONE" FOR A RENEWAL OF
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DIRECT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HIMSELF AND SADAT. IF THE TONE PROVES TO BE A POSITIVE ONE, HE SAID, HE THEN THOUGHT HE WOULD ASK ATHERTON TO SUGGEST TO SADAT THAT THE TWO LEADERS FIND A WAY TO MEET AGAIN IN THE NEAR FUTURE "MAN TO MAN." HE SEEMED TO HAVE IN MIND SUGGESTING A QUIET MEETING, PERHAPS WITH ONLY THE TWO LEADERS PRESENT, AT SOME NEUTRAL SPOT, BUT HE DID NOT SPELL OUT FURTHER THE IDEA. HE SEEMED OBVIOUSLY TO REMAIN WISTFULLY HOPEFUL OF PUTTING BEHIND THEM THE NEGATIVE SIGNALS OF A PERSONAL NATURE WHICH HAVE BEEN PASSING IN RECENT WEEKS, AND GETTING BACK SOMEHOW TO THE FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE WHICH CHARACTERIZED THE

JERUSALEM MEETINGS AND, AT LEAST IN BEGIN'S MIND, THE MEETINGS AT ISMAILIA. HE ASKED ME WHETHER I DID NOT THINK SUCH A MEETING WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA. I SAID MERELY THAT "IT MIGHT BE, IF THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE RIGHT."

3. THIS EXCHANGE UNDERSCORES AGAIN HOW IMPORTANT A FACTOR THE SADAT ORAL MESSAGE MAY TURN OUT TO BE. NOT ONLY WILL IT BE SEEN BY BEGIN AS A CHALLENGE AND REBUFF IF ITS TONE IS WRONG, BUT IT WOULD IRREVOCABLY CLOSE SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL DOORS HERE WHICH ARE STILL AJAR, BUT HAVE BEEN CLOSING IN RECENT WEEKS. ONE THING WHICH STRIKES ME ABOUT SADAT'S MESSAGE AS IT PRESENTLY STANDS, IS THE LACK OF WHAT FOR BEGIN IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF ANY DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH ANOTHER LEADER: SOME WORDS OF A WARM PERSONAL NATURE. BEGIN IS, AS WE ALL KNOW WELL, A MAN OF CONSIDERABLE EMOTION. THE ABSENCE OF ANY "GRACE NOTES" AT THE BEGINNING OR THE END OF SADAT'S MESSAGE COULD WELL INTENSIFY HIS NEGATIVE REACTIONS AND HIS DEFIANCE IN RESPONSE TO SOME OF THE ROUGHER PASSAGES WITHIN THE MESSAGE. IT WOULD BE WORTHWHILE FOR ATHERTON TO CALL THIS DIMENSION TO SADAT'S ATTENTION AS HE DISCUSSES SOME OF THE OTHER POINTS.

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4. AGREE THOROUGHLY WITH DEPT'S VIEW IN REFTEL THAT SADAT'S MESSAGE WILL BE AN IMPORTANT SCENE-SETTER FOR BEGIN'S WASHINGTON TRIP. SADAT CAN AND SHOULD EXPECT A REPLY FROM BEGIN BEFORE HE GOES TO WASHINGTON. NATURE OF REPLY WILL HINGE HEAVILY, I FEAR, ON TONE OF SADAT'S PRESENTATION.
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